# The Unromantic Peace

The corridor smells of dust and candle wax. Coats hang like a second door against November. Somewhere a kettle clicks; somewhere a phone glows; the lights exhale and die. That is the meter now: surge, blackout, restart. The argument fits in the dark between two clicks—this war has to end, even if the compromises are ugly

enough to stain the page. Not for romance. For electricity, for hospitals that do not fail at dawn, for children who learn that winter is a season and not a sentence. In late November, more than 400,000 Ukrainians were still without power after a single set of strikes; the grid is hunted like a living thing, and people measure life by the hour of heat.

The civilian ledger moves month by month, monotonous and brutal: 148 killed and 929 injured in October; September worse, August close behind. No crescendo—just attrition you could set a metronome to.

Open the butcher’s book, because euphemism is a luxury trenches don’t have. Russia: independent naming by Mediazona and BBC Russian now confirms

roughly 149,000 dead by name—grave by grave, obituary by obituary—while broader assessments place total Russian casualties (killed and wounded) at about 1.1 million, with daily averages this autumn close to a thousand. That cadence implies hundreds of thousands more inside a year if nothing changes, an amputation by conveyor belt. Ukraine: official statements concede tens of thousands

killed; reputable syntheses land near 60–100k KIA with roughly ~400k too injured to return. Kyiv lowered the mobilization age from 27 to 25, yet even officials and allied reports describe an average soldier past forty—parents, foremen, teachers, the backbone cohort you need when the guns fall quiet.

Arithmetic has no taste for glorious endings. It only knows slopes.

Now widen the frame to the room history sits in. The geopolitics here aren't chalked fresh in 2022; they're a century's sediment. The backyard in Leningrad—courtyards of bread-crust and ash after the siege—belongs not as a veto on anyone's sovereignty but as the echo chamber of Russian security fear. The Soviet Union's war dead are measured in tens of millions;

scholarly ranges sit around 26–27 million total losses, with Leningrad alone often counted at ~800,000 to 1.1+ million dead. Memory becomes posture; posture becomes doctrine. Understand the buffer obsession; do not excuse the invasion. Those are different vectors.

That memory later collided with modern paperwork. Munich 2007 gave grievance

a microphone; Bucharest 2008 wrote, in the future tense, that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members” of NATO. In Kyiv that sentence read as overdue insurance; in Moscow, as a flare. Hold both truths without swallowing either: sovereign states choose alignments; borders are not revised by bombardment. A ceasefire must freeze fire without killing that principle.

Meanwhile, the home front is not tidy. Martial-law extensions keep elections on ice; the wartime TV **telethon** has drifted from rally-round-the-flag to something critics in Europe call a habit that narrows pluralism; mobilization keeps tightening. Tools of survival can outlive the job unless an expiry date is written on the handle. And corruption has not taken a holiday. In

November, Ukraine's anti-graft bureau alleged a $100 million kickback machine centered on Energoatom—arrests, suspensions, and board changes followed within days. The right response to this isn't cynicism; it's conditionality. Every euro and dollar through a turnstile that bites.

Europe isn't just clucking from the sidelines; it's paying the heavy, boring bills. The

EU's Ukraine Facility—up to €50 billion for 2024–2027—exists precisely to make the money predictable and the oversight hard-edged. Money is leverage, and leverage only works when it can stop mid-flow.

So what does an unromantic peace look like?
It begins with what stops people from dying this week. A monitored ceasefire that freezes lines to bend the

funeral curve. No-strike rings around power, water, and hospitals, verified by sensors and satellites, paired with automatic penalties for violations. POW and remains exchanges on a timetable under neutral custody, DNA labs funded to meet reality rather than hope. Sunsets on emergency powers that force a return to pluralism unless parliament renews them in daylight. Aid gates that open only when audits clear, with

clawbacks and blacklists that actually bite. Interim security guarantees—air defense, ISR, resupply tempos—that raise the price of cheating without pretending borders are solved on day one. None of this is pretty. It's triage with clipboards. But triage is how you save a limb you still hope to dance with.

The counter-claim—that only maximal victory is moral—sounds clean and starlit. The

fronts don’t read manifestos; they read bodies, transformers, and birth registries. Civilian deaths stack by the hundred each month; soldiers fall by the thousand; the grid stutters; demography tilts like a graph you hide from your children. This is not the moment for a brass finale. It’s the moment to buy time, oxygen, and winter heat—and argue for justice over years, not weeks.

If egos are the toll to cross the bridge to ceasefire, pay the toll and keep the receipt. Kyiv already said the quiet part out loud: if Donald Trump actually lands a real ceasefire, nominate him for the Nobel. Fine. Hang the medal and let Oslo sweat the optics. If flattery buys fewer funerals, send the paperwork and enjoy a night without sirens.

End it, even if it hurts. End it

with conditions you can enforce, not hopes you can quote. End it because children should remember winter for snow, not for the sound a turbine makes when it dies.